

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, January 2002

Transcribed by Marilyn Hunting and Kathleen Irving, 2002

Kathleen Irving (KI): This is Kathi Irving. I'm talking with Tex Ross at his home, 142 South 200 East in Vernal. Why don't you tell me about your life before we talk about music.

George "Tex" Ross (Tex): I thought it might be good to give you a little background, my folks, when they came into Vernal and so on. It's kind of interesting. My grandfather was James Jackson Ross. He was Brigham Young's bodyguard at one time, way back. My father was born in 1876. When he was seven years old, him and his dad brought the first horse-powered threshing machine to Vernal. They hired seven men to help them. The old highway came in on this side of Fruitland a ways and it went down over the Golden Stairs.

KI: The Golden Stairs. I've never heard of that. Where was that?

Tex: Yeah, what they called the Golden Stairs. The highway went down to Tabiona and it jumped from one ledge down to another and come back and forth to the bottom, down on the Duchesne River. Then it went down the Duchesne River to the Bench and on over to Duchesne. That's the way they had to go. I don't remember, but Dad told me how long they were getting it to Vernal. When they got here they threshed wheat and got a share of the wheat; they lived three weeks on straight boiled wheat. It sounds bad, but it's a wonderful cereal, boiled wheat. Mary and I use it every once in a while because we like it.

But anyway, they came here and our place was 160 acres in Glines Ward. That's where they settled. Gee, when I was a kid, they had a nice orchard, my gosh, they had everything. They had bees; the place was covered with cattle. They had a regular cattle ranch at that time.

KI: What would the address be today?

Tex: You know where the Fletcher Corner is? You know where the new chapel is, up there? Well, all the south side, clear from that corner, above the chapel, clear down to Bob Jones' corner; that was our place, it was a mile long. The bottom of it would be on 5<sup>th</sup> West and go a mile west to the Fletcher Corner.

KI: Your mom came out, too? Were they already married? Or was this your grandfather?

Tex: No. She came out when my father was around twenty years old.

KI: So, it was your grandfather who originally moved out here?

Tex: Yes. Like I said, they come out here when my father was seven years old. It was Granddad that was bringing the threshing machine, of course. Dad was just a little guy. But my mother came later, I don't know what year. She was a Young.

KI: What was her full name?

Tex: Fannie Jane Young.

KI: Who were her parents?

Tex: Her mother was Mary McDonald and she married a Young. I never did know him, my mother's father. They split up and he moved away somewhere. I never did know him.

But anyway, they had no place to live; they was just out here struggling to find place to get along. My granddad told them if they wanted to clean up the blacksmith shop, they could move in there 'til they could find something. That's how my dad and mom got to meet each other. She was only fourteen years old then. When they were married, she was just two months away from fifteen years old and Dad was twenty.

They was together all their lives and she had twelve children, all born in the same room. This surprises people: in the same house and in same room, all twelve of us.

KI: So, they just stayed on the ranch out there? They built a house on the same ranch?

Tex: Yes. By the time I came along, they had 160 acres up on Diamond Mountain and 160 acres in Mountain Home. They had the ranch. Actually, my oldest brother, Jim Ross, he was the cowboy for the cattle and they run the cattle up there in the summertime, in Mountain Home. Then in the wintertime they would bring them back here to Vernal.

Everything was going beautiful good. My dad told me that one time he was out there where the chickens had been scratching, and they scratched up a big coffee can; he picked it up and it was full of gold pieces, twenty-dollar gold pieces. His dad wouldn't put any money in the bank 'cause he was afraid of banks. So he said he just gave it to his dad and he just grinned, and took it, and buried it somewhere else. My grandfather died in his sleep and he had four, twenty-dollar gold pieces in his purse, and that was it. What happened to the gold, nobody knows.

One time I had a friend, he had a metal counter about six or eight, maybe ten years ago. I was telling him about it. He said, "Let's go up there. I've got a coin counter." So, we went up there and we was messing around and a lady come out, Mrs. Fletcher, that lived there close, first house. She wanted to know what we were doing. I said, "I'm trying to find where our house used to sit here." There's some big trees that I recognized, one or two still growing, terrific big, I used to play on them when I was a child. She said, "You must a Ross then." I said, "I am." She said, "You go ahead and do anything you want to."

My father had to borrow \$3,000 to pay off three half-sisters he had back in New York. He had never seen these girls.

KI: Why would he have to pay them off?

Tex: To pay for the ranch. See, when his dad... He figured there was four of them in the family, figuring those three girls. He figured it would be fair to give them each \$1,000. He never could pay that \$3,000 back. He borrowed it from Lee Fletcher and that's why that's Fletcher's Corner.

Mom said they always thought that if they had to let the place go, Lee would give them an acre or something they could live on, but he didn't. He built a big mansion of a home right

there on the corner. My gosh, his wife died in that home, and it burned right after that. So, it did them very little good. That whole place now, all those homes: new housing. My gosh, it has been worth a fortune. Of course, we don't know anything about it.

KI: When did your Dad finally lose the farm? Did he lose the ranch?

Tex: Yeah, he lost it. He tried cattle and had hard luck with them. He went into sheep and didn't do too good with that either. We lost the place in 1925.

KI: Before the Depression?

Tex: Oh, yeah. In 1925. We came down here just west of Vernal and rented a place from Johnsons for one year. Then they moved up. Against the hill there were some old cabins, dirt-roofed cabins, they called the Wall cabins, and we moved into those for the next winter. Then we moved to American Fork. My gosh, it was quite a move—the “Grapes of Wrath”—they had a cow and two pigs.

KI: Tell me the names of your brothers and sisters.

Tex: My oldest brother was James and he died when he was eighteen. He got sick in Mountain Home. They brought him home to Vernal. I was nine months old when he died. Melvin was second, then Myrtle, then Floyd, then Ann, Ada, Rose, Alice, and Mar Ross, my older brother, just two years older than me.

KI: Moore?

Tex: No. At first they had N.J. Meagher's name, M-E-A-G-H-E-R. But he got so tired of the kids in school making fun of him, calling him ‘Meager’; so he had it changed, legally, to Mar, M-A-R. We've always called him Slim, he's slim. Anyway, Mar, then I, and Elaine. I was the baby boy and Elaine was six years younger than I, and she's the baby girl.

KI: How many of them are still alive?

Tex: There's just four of us. Elaine and Alice, Alice is ninety-three and lives in Washington and is still doing good, Elaine is about seventy-nine, and Slim and I. He is eighty-nine and I'm eighty-six. We're all up there. Just the four of us left.

KI: So, you moved to American Fork. Did things go better for your family?

Tex: My sister, Myrtle, lived there when we moved to American Fork. We was only there for one summer. My dad went to work up in Bingham Canyon in the mine, then he moved to Park City and went to work in the mine and moved us to Park City. We moved there in 1927. I think I was about eleven years old and I lived there all through school. That's where I was married and so on. I was actually married in Heber City. But we were living in Park City at the time.

KI: What did Park City look like then?

Tex: Well, I'll tell you it doesn't look like it does now. Up the canyon, up the Judge Canyon, we lived up on Ontario Ridge. We was right in the south end of Park City. Down below us was Empire Canyon that went up to most of the mines. There was houses on both sides of that canyon, just shells, you might say. In the wintertime, they would push the snow, all you could see was the roofs. You would see the roofs and the smoke coming out of the smoke stacks and it would look almost like a tunnel where they had dug out, dug in to each house.

They cleared the snow out of the roads; they were hauling ore with sleds in them days. My first memory was the bobsled going up and bringing the ore down to the mill with horses. But then they had some old, white Mack trucks came out, chain-driven, the rear wheels were driven with a chain, and they came out and started hauling the ore. That kind of done away with the teams and the bobsleds. That's how they were in them days. Dad worked in the mine for years. Actually, he was still working there long after the mines were closed.

What happened was, they had a strike. The miners struck for better wages. The mines were already struggling because the water was coming up in the mine. They had to keep pumps a-goin' all the time. As soon as the miners struck and quit, the mines just flooded out. So they just gave up.

KI: Then there were no jobs at all?

Tex: There was no jobs. My gosh, I can't remember what year that was, but I sat down there. Some of the mine people went to Heber and Midway and some of those towns and hired a bunch of guys that was to come and take the miners' place. I was there at the foot of Main Street when they came and the population of Park City was right there waiting for them, they knew they were coming. I seen something that very few people see. I seen what mob rule does. I stood there ready to cry. They took them guys and beat them and pounded them over the head. Threw rocks and knocked them cold. This happened to those guys that they hired to come in to go to work. I seen a bunch of women dragging a guy up the street and kicking him from all sides. This type of thing. It was sad. To me it was out of this world. He was unconscious already. I couldn't believe it, how crazy people could go.

I had a five-room home I bought in Park City. When we left there, I sold it for \$150. All they wanted was the bathroom fixtures, they didn't want the house itself. In fact, Mary and I went back, I wanted to show her that house. We met a young man that had bought it. I forget what he paid, but it was a terrible price. But he had it fixed up and it was as cute as it could be.

Between my wife and I—they had two other homes there, her folks had—they sold one of them for \$400 and they had bought a place that used to be a dentist's home, a big home, and they sold that for \$1500. That went to the kids. The old folks had died. We had two kids that remained with us, my wife's brother and sister. They were half-brother and half-sister, rather, and they lived with us when we moved even out here to Ballard. Lived with us 'til they were married many years later.

KI: So you met your wife in Park City. Her name was Nora, wasn't it?

Tex: Yes. Nora Louise. We went to school together.

KI: How many kids were in the school?

Tex: I don't remember. There was quite a lot. We had a hundred-some odd in the high school band. So, at that time it was quite a lot.

KI: So, it was a pretty good sized school then, it wasn't just one room. Did they have an elementary school and a Jr. High and a high school at the time, or did they put them together?

Tex: I don't think they had a Jr. High. The elementary schools went up to the eighth grade, then they went right into high school. 'Course the schools were changing, too. They built a new big school over on the east side of town before we ever left there.

I started playing music when I was thirteen years old. My mom bought a little guitar from a guy that come selling them. It was a wood guitar, there were no electrics or anything in them days, just a little wood guitar. You played it with a steel; it was a Hawaiian guitar. That's what they called it then, they call them steel guitars now days, 'cause they use a steel. But it was Hawaiian guitar and Mom couldn't learn to play it. My dad and her, when we lived at Vernal, had an organ and they used to sing beautiful together. My dad played the organ, not my mother. But she couldn't learn that Hawaiian guitar and she said, "Any of you kids, whoever learns it, can have the guitar." I used to run home—my school was just two miles from home. I'd run home at noon as fast as I could so I could practice on that guitar. I learned to play guitar and mandolin from thirteen on. I met a bunch of guys at a program we played to. They played mandolins and guitars and stuff and they told me they wanted to start a band, so I teamed in with them guys and we started the Park City Wranglers. We got to be quite a famous little band. We played dances from then on, until I was out of high school.

My gosh, Louise and I got married in 1936 and I went to work there for a while in Star Meat and Grocery. Used to be right there across from the old post office. I think the post office is still in the same place. Anyway, I worked there for a while as a delivery man. I delivered ice because everybody had iceboxes. I delivered ice and made ice and what have you. Worked other jobs in between. Then I went to Echo Canyon and went to work for the railroad. I was playing every week and we ended up in Echo. Well, I went to work first at Castle Rock, that's up the canyon between Evanston and Echo.

Then we got laid off, so I moved to Echo and we lived there for a couple of years. My oldest daughter was born in Park City in 1937. My oldest boy was born in Echo. I told him we had a little house. I said, "Nothing but a coal shed when you were born." So, as a kid, he would tell all the kids that he was born in a coal shed in Echo, Utah. When I finally heard what he was telling them, I told him that wasn't exactly right. It was a tar-paper shack, but it wasn't a coal shed.

They had a spur track that went to Park City to haul the ore. Of course, Echo was a railroad town, so I used to hop on that on Saturday and go up. My folks still lived up on the Ridge in the same place. I'd go up to their place and I'd play a dance on Saturday night. We got \$3 apiece for the dance.

KI: That was probably a nice little extra.

Tex: Yeah, it was. Most times it was the only money we had. On the railroad, they gave us a five-cent raise which brought us up to \$3 a day.

KI: A *day*?

Tex: Three dollars a day, that's what I made from the Union Pacific.

KI: So, to get three dollars for an evening of playing, that was pretty good.

Tex: Yeah, that was a day's wages and it really helped, especially through the times I was laid off.

I used to work for a dairy in Echo just for milk and cream. They give me all the milk and cream I wanted; we made butter and got by just fine. We gathered watercress and mushrooms. A neighbor showed me how to pick mushrooms. We was below the dam and they grew in there beautiful. My gosh, when I went back to work on the railroad, the guys was all laughing, they was on the man car that we road out to work. I said, "What's the matter?" They said, "You look like you've got the toothache on both sides." That had just done me a lot of good through the summertime.

KI: When you were in the band you played trombone, didn't you?

Tex: Yes. A lady come there one time and Mom said, "Get that guitar, George, and play this lady a tune." So, I took the guitar and I played a couple of old time tunes and I looked up and tears were coming down her eyes. She told my mom, "Get this boy ready, I'm going to take him somewhere with me." She took me down and introduced me to the band leader. He was a school teacher, also, but he was the band leader, and he needed trombone players. He talked to my dad and Dad bought me a trombone. I played trombone all through my school days. I played in the symphony orchestra, in the band; I went with the All-State Band up to the A.C. in Logan. I was a member of the All-State Band. We had two hundred and something members in that and they was from three or four different mountain states.

The band leader had this band, he had a dance band also. I played trombone in his dance band. I was playing trombone with the Park City Wranglers and ever once in a while they had a dance, too, the same night and I had to pick out which one to play with. That made it kind of bad.

KI: Did you like the guitar better than the trombone, or did you just like them all?

Tex: Well, I got good on the trombone and loved the trombone, but I still couldn't get away from the strings. I was playing strings at home all the time. My brother, Slim, he got interested and learned to play the Spanish guitar. So, we got so we could play together.

In 1939 we moved to California, both him and I. He had designed and built a little airplane. He built it right in his house. You've heard of the guy that had to tear the house down to get the plane out? Well, that was him. The only reason we had to move anything, they had quite a big window there, but the landing gear wouldn't come out, the fuselage and the landing gear, and we had to tear a little bit out of there to get it out plus the window. Everybody got a big kick out of that.

We was working on the plane in about 1932. I was working on the railroad, but I'd come home on weekends and help him. We took it down to Snyderville and used to take off in a little cow pasture in Snyderville. We had a lot of engine trouble. It had a two-cylinder engine that Slim had just about built himself, out of a motorcycle engine. It had thirty-five horsepower. But, we flew it, got by fine. He had something like seven hours of dual instruction in Salt Lake and I had two hours and forty minutes when I flew it first. I never did have any trouble as far as flying. We had a lot of engine trouble, though.

Anyway, we moved our families to California and came back and got the plane later. He just had two kids and I had two kids. We moved down there in a Model A Ford. One interesting thing: before we left Park City, we were afraid we would get into high gas prices, so we bought four, ten-gallon milk cans and filled them full of gas. When we got down around St. George the milk cans were empty. They had rattled on the rear bumpers where we had them tied until it had made a hole in the cans. We never had no gas. Anyway, the further we went the cheaper the gas was and when we got into California it was eleven cents a gallon. We got into L.A.

We went up to Douglas Aircraft in Santa Monica when we got settled and rustled for a job. 'Course they put him right on because he had built this airplane. It took me a week to get through there. They had three interviewers that you had to talk to to get a job. One of the three had turned me down each time, but I had a picture of me launching a big gas model that we had built in Park City. He said, "Oh, you're a model builder?" I said, "Yeah, we built a lot of models." He said, "Go on," and he sent me right on in. I went in and went to work in the experimental division, both of us did. He went to work on aircraft instruments and I went in as a general mechanic. We were there about three years.

KI: So, during the war then? Then kept you on during the war especially?

Tex: Well, it was before the war, but the war come along while we were there. But on our vacation, we'd gone up to Hill Field and put in an application there, 'cause we wanted to come back home. They had just built them four big hangars at Hill Field. My gosh, there was nothing in them, they were just empty. They had already hired us because we was working at the aircraft plant, all we had to do was make out an application and they hired us.

We was to report there for work on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December and on the 7<sup>th</sup> was Pearl Harbor. And my gosh, we were afraid, because they were tying the guys down on the job and wouldn't let them quit. We was afraid we wouldn't be able to go to Hill Field. But, it didn't turn out that way. Heck, we didn't really have any trouble when we got ready to leave. We went to work at Hill Field.

I went through a lot of jobs at Hill Field, and we were also playing all the time. My brother-in-law, Elaine's husband, we'd talked him into buying a bass fiddle, a big slap bass, and then we really got into music. While I was in California I'd bought an electric steel guitar, one of the finest I ever had in my life, the finest sound. We were playing, the three of us. We didn't play anywhere big, but we played a round of house parties and what have you. People just loved it 'cause it was something kind of new. They were hearing this kind of music coming out of Hawaii and what have you. Anyway, we was still playing music when I was at Hill Field.

One thing I forgot in 1944 while we were still in Park City at that time.

KI: You were still in Park City in 1944?

Tex: Well, no, I was back and forth. We moved back. After I quit Hill Field, I moved back to Park City and went to work in the mines for a year. That year we went to Salt Lake and played KDYL. That was the first time we ever played radio. We played there through the wintertime.

At Hill Field they put me as group leader because I'd had aircraft experience. They were hiring guys by then, by the thousands, and none of them had any experience working aircraft and we'd worked at Douglas. So, I went up the line, just about every job. The guy that was over me, George Bishop was his name, each time they would put him on a higher job he'd bring me into his position. At one time I was hangar foreman for all four of those hangars and there was sixty men in there working and I had sixty guys under me. Then from that I went to coordinator and would spend four hours with one shift and four hours with the next shift and try to bring the information on what they was working on to coordinate it. It was a tough job, and I had to go to work at two o'clock in the morning. I'll tell you what, I couldn't sleep, it was harder on my health than anything. When I left Hill Field I was aircraft inspector.

We moved to Layton when I went to work at Hill Field. We had the little airplane there, we'd rebuilt it while we were in California, completely. It didn't look like the same craft at all, it looked neat. I lived down in a little farm field, it was kind of down under, off the highway, down in a little canyon. The only building down there was that little farm home. We found that to rent. They had a nice little hay field there and we started flying the airplane out of that.

But Hill Field soon caught on to us. This was during the war. They stopped us right quick. One of the guys working at Hill Field bought the plane. His home was in Afton, Wyoming. He said he would buy it, if we would bring it up there and fly it. So we did. We took it to Afton and flew it for him. That was the last time we ever seen that airplane. But we had had a lot of problems with it, my gosh.

One thing I didn't tell you about. When we were in California, Slim had rebuilt the craft; we'd both worked on it, of course. We started flying out of a little field there, we were living at Playa del Rey by then, it was south of Santa Monica about ten miles. There was oil wells over in there with wood structures. There was a little strip the side of Bologna Creek, they called it, that's where we landed. It wasn't a landing strip, of course, it was just an open field. We flew it out of there a few times until the caretaker of them oil wells caught up with us. He said, "Take off, but don't land here no more." So, we found an airport over in Downey, California. They was starting to build houses in there and taking up ground. As an airport but it was kaput, you know, they'd quit using it. But it still had a pretty good runway and what have you.

I'll have to tell you this story. We decided to go over there. We had been having engine trouble. My gosh, trying to keep the little engine a-goin' was something else. Slim had his hands full working on it. He was adjusting the darn carburetor all the time. But anyway, we decided, my nephew was there, he lived with us at that time or right there close. Slim took off an hour and a half ahead to go to Downey, so he'd be there when I got there. I was to fly the airplane. So, my nephew came over to crank it, to get it started for me. Just before he left, Slim wasn't satisfied with the way it was running, so he tinkered with that carburetor for quite a while. He had it running, sounded pretty good and pretty smooth. Downey is right across L.A. from where we lived, right straight across. I'd learned a little bit about navigation while we was a-tinkering down there and got me some books on it and I savvied how to set the compass and so on and we could get along. Anyway, Farrell cranked the engine and I took off and I just got up a few hundred feet and one cylinder quit, but I couldn't go back and I decided, well, if it kept running I



would keep flying, I'd just hope for the best. I kept creeping that up. You know, we were at sea level and an airplane flies wonderful good down there. Better than to the side of Park City, at such a high elevation.

Anyway, one cylinder quit. Now, a lot of people think I'm telling a tall story, but this is the truth, it happened. I kept easing up and got up just as high as I could, my gosh, there was white houses as far as I could see in all directions when I got out there a ways over L.A. I thought, well, if the little old engine actually quits, I'll just head south and try to get into a field somewhere, just glide. But it kept on a-popping and I came right over the field at Downey. One reason that we wanted to go to Downey: one of the guys we were working for in the plant was a good pilot and he said, "If you guys would bring that over to Downey," he said, "I'll fly it, I'll spin it, whatever." It had never been tested for tailspins and one thing or another to see how it would act. He said, "If you will buy me a parachute, I'll put it through the paces." So, that was the deal.

Well, he was there with my brother, and I came over quite high. He said, "My gosh, what's that powered with, a Maytag engine?" A little old Maytag [was a] one cylinder deal. He said, "No, I don't know what's happened," 'cause the one cylinder wasn't working. Anyway, I landed. They tinkered with the carburetor and got it running pretty good and he took it up and got way up high, right over the field and the engine quit entirely. The pilot had the chute and everything, but he went ahead and put it in tailspins and all kinds of gyrations before he got down. He said it was solid as could be. Never had a bit of trouble, even landing.

KI: Except the engine quit.

Tex: Except the engine quit, but that's why he got right overhead, in case it did and that's what happened. Anyway, when we moved to Hill Field, we took the airplane with us. He had the wings on his car and I had the fuselage on my car, or vice versa, I can't remember just which. We sneaked out of L.A. in the night. We thought they'd stop us somewhere and wouldn't let us go with it. We went up through Victorville and clear to Hill Field. Of course, we was the next day getting up here and nobody bothered. Well, once, I seen a bunch of lights a-flashin' and siren a-goin' and I thought, oh boy, they've picked old Slim up. He had the fuselage up over his car, he'd built a rack. I had the wings, that's how it was. I thought they'd caught him and arrested him.

KI: And that would have been illegal just because it was war time? Is that right?

Tex: Well, I don't know, but probably. We was worried because, well, we'd tried to get a license was what happened. We tried to get a license to take it. We had a little trailer, too, and something about the trailer, they wouldn't give us a permit. So, we just took off in the night and came home. Anyway that's the way we did things in them days, I guess.

Like I said, he finally sold the plane. We took it up to Afton and flew and that guy, I think we got \$350 for it. It was just a tiny, single-place plane. It only weighed 400 pounds but it worked fine, except all the engine troubles. What it needed was a good engine. That ended our flying experience there for a while, until we got out here in Roosevelt, living over in Ballard. I'll have to go into that a little deeper.

KI: I want to know why you quit working at Hill Field.

Tex: Well, I'll tell you. It's a long story. I was supervisor before I went any higher. When I was supervisor of the four hangars, I told you, they appointed another guy to take my place on my day off. He was riding in with the superintendent of Hill Field; see it was all civilian at that time. What happened, I don't know. He was a guy that knew nothing about airplanes; he'd go around and ask questions and write down what rudder pedals were, he didn't know nothing. It didn't take long before I was the alternate and he was the supervisor. I got disenchanted. It got worse and worse, there's no use to go into it. But, they finally put me from supervisor into aircraft inspector. It was a good job. Some of the guys, my mechanics working under me, come out of an aircraft school in Cheyenne, there were eleven of them. They all worked under me and one come to see me in Roosevelt, years later. He was an inspector. His whole job was to go to an aircraft plant and inspect the planes for the government. He said, "My gosh, Tex, if you had stayed there, you'd have been superintendent of the whole place."

KI: Well, sometimes the frustration is so bad, you just don't want to hang around at a particular time. I understand that.

Tex: Well, we was still playing, but wasn't playing radio any more. We'd done that through that one winter, but we'd auditioned for some stations, even KSL. They wanted to get a "Sons of the Pioneers" type deal. They turned us down. But we'd auditioned several of them.

After I left Park City, I went back to Ogden, went to work at the Army Depot on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Slim and I were both inspectors there. He got on as an inspector and got me on as an inspector, too. There's no use to go into what we had to do, but we had good jobs. They didn't pay a whole lot, but they were good jobs. I think I was making \$35 a week there. Anyway, a guy came in to Salt Lake looking for a western band, he had a traveling show. They had ten shows that they could put on, mostly comedy stuff, but he needed a western band for radio advertising and what have you. Wherever he went, they told him about me 'cause we were the only thing there was in that line. So, we were hired un-sight and unseen. He hired us and we moved to Grand Junction. That was in 1946, right after the war. We moved to Grand Junction and went to work playing KFXJ. We'd play five programs a week. They had fifteen-minute programs every morning advertising the show, plus other commercials.

KI: Did you play them all live?

Tex: No. We played a lot of them live, but we recorded the shows. Sometimes we'd play the first one and we'd have the rest of them recorded. What they had at that time, they had big sixteen-inch acetone disks. They was soft and the recorder actually cut the grooves; that was the recording. We'd make five shows and we had thirty seconds between shows. If you had a string out, you just had time to reach up there and tune it just a little bit then we'd go right into our theme song again for the next day. We'd play our theme song at the end of that, then in thirty seconds we'd have to go into the theme for the next one.

Funny thing, too, that happened. Our boss, Harry Evans, was the boss of the show and he was the MC for the radio show. Now see, we was making these ahead of time, almost a week. He'd say, "Boy, we sure had a beautiful crowd out at Cow Creek," or wherever we were supposed to play a certain day, and invariably we would have a terrific crowd. I never seen

anything like it. It would work out every time. It was four or five days later, see, and it would work out every time. It was a funny thing. It's just something that's in my head.

What they had, the first fifteen minutes of show we went out there and played on the stage, just like we were playing radio. After we played, just us four, my oldest brother, Mel... I don't know if I mentioned him. Melvin, he was my oldest brother, he was born in 1900, he played the violin.

KI: Now, was he older than Jim? Jim was the oldest, but he died.

Tex: No, Mel was the second. I think I skipped and went down to Floyd. He played violin with us. He had played all his life.

KI: So who was in that band? Mel, and you and Slim?

Tex: Yeah, there was three of us brothers. Cy, we called him, he always went by Cy. Cy and Slim and myself. Cy was Mel, Slim was Mar.

KI: So, we had Cy, Slim and Tex!

Tex: Sounds good anyway. And Kurly. See, Kurly was my brother-in-law. He and Elaine did most of the singing.

We left the show in Grand Junction. They was moving up into Montana. All us guys had kids, you know. Nobody wanted to go except me. I wanted to go and I would have gone, but the other guys wouldn't do it. So, we decided to come back to Vernal. We was just playing dances. After the show left, we stayed there and played dances for a while. We did very well.

KI: You'd moved your whole family out to Grand Junction?

Tex: Yeah, oh yeah. We'd moved, all of us moved to Grand Junction. We played with that Harry Evans show that I was telling you about. I should have told you a little more about that show. They had a forty-five minute comedy that they would put on each night. We'd be in a different town each night. Then the last hour we would play as a dance band. Harry Evans played drums and his wife played piano. Two of the guys that were comedy actors were also musicians, so we had a seven-piece band. So the last hour or so, up 'til midnight, we just played dance music. But, we opened the show, then they had forty-five minutes of what they called "black outs," we'd just do special stuff, like Kurly and I used to play, both of us, would play the same guitar, this type of thing, novelty stuff. Or we'd put on what we'd called "pass the bull." We could all play the bass fiddle, so we'd play up to the break on the tune, and then pass the instrument. We was all standing around. We'd pass our instrument and take the next guy's instrument and go right on with the tune. We called it "passing the bull." Everybody loved that kind of stuff, you know, better than they did the music, actually.

But we played a lot of good stuff. We had good instruments, the very best. I had a pre-war Martin guitar. We run over going to a dance, backing the car out, one night. That guitar now, would be worth, I don't know how much. A Herringbone pre-war would go for \$35,000. It had a beautiful tone, beautiful. I had a Gibson mandolin, beautiful. Kurly had a bass made in Germany,

that was a good one. I had a Gibson steel guitar. Cy, 'course , had his old violin that he'd had all his life. So, we had good instrumentation. We done a lot of singing together, good stuff. I'm sorry I don't have a whole lot to let people listen to. I've got some things, but the way they was recorded back in them early days was not the very best.

KI: Tell me some of the songs that you especially liked to play, some that people like to listen to.

Tex: Gosh, have you got all day? Our stuff was old, we was playing stuff like "San Antonio Rose." Oh my gosh, I've got a thousand names in my mind, but my mind ain't too good anymore.

Slim had an airplane, and we was still flying airplanes when we were playing in the Barn. We landed just up there behind it. Slim and Kurly bought that ground there; 160 acres in Ballard. We was playing the Oasis dance hall when we first came here. Oh, we got crowds, no matter where we went. Because the people in Myton had been listening to us over KFXJ. They were picking it up here, so we were pretty well advertised. When we got here we had no trouble.

KI: Is that the only thing you did, your music? You didn't have another job at the time?

Tex: Not in the early days. After about six or eight years, yes, we all had to go to work somewhere, because things were getting rough in the dance. It was going down little by little. We had some tough guys that were running our good customers away. It finally went out and we had to go to work.

I went to work in the sign business. In fact, I should still be in it, but I'm not doing much now. I worked here for many years in signs. I worked for Ashtons for six years when I first came here. Ashton Construction. They had a construction crew and I worked for them for six years and I got back into the sign work. I had worked before with Joe Norton, Norton Signs in Roosevelt.

KI: He was a blacksmith, wasn't he?

Tex: His dad was.

[Begin Tape 322]

Tex: While we were playing dances at Myton and some of these other dance halls, we started timbering on the mountain. A lot of the dance halls, or one or two or them, wouldn't hire us in the wintertime because they could get any kind of music in the world. They got a good crowd no matter what they did. So I was bluffin' and I told two different ones, I said, "If you guys don't start lettin' us have..." We wouldn't play these dance halls unless we could do it on our own. We had our own ticket taker and we would just hire the hall outright. So that's the only way we'd go. That's the only way we could really make it, you know. So, I was tellin' these guys, I said, "If you don't let us have the hall in the wintertime, we're going to have to build one." I was bluffing. I never no more thought we would build a dance hall than anything in the world. But it got serious there for a while and we decided, we was already timbering, bringing timber off to build our houses, we'd each build a home right there by the Barn, just one right after another going west from the Barn.

So we was already up there in the timber and pretty well knew what we were doing. Of course, it was all hand stuff. There was no chainsaws in them days. You worked. It was work. We'd go to work and had a little wagon made out of a Model T Ford and we had a Model A Ford to pull it. We could bring down three logs at a time. So, we'd bring them down. Floyd Warburton had a sawmill up above Lapoint, up in there. I don't know what you call that place up there, but it's just before you go up on the mountain. It's on the road. Anyway, we'd bring them down to the sawmill there and he'd saw them up for us and bring them down.

So, we got serious and decided, by gosh, we'd better go ahead and build. We just kept working, bringing timber down. Some of the timbers we had to buy because they wouldn't be big enough, maybe, for the ceiling or a floor joist and stuff. But when we got ready, we flew into that building and we build it up and had it going in four months. Just the band and my brother, Floyd, helped us. He wasn't a musician, but he helped us build, because Cy lived here in Vernal and he couldn't be there very much. So, we built the Barn.

We opened it in 1947 on the 20th of December. On Christmas night, a few days later, we sold a thousand tickets. They couldn't get in. They was most out in the yard, but, boy, they was crowded in there, crowded as much as they could get in there.

KI: Let me ask a question before we go on with that. What dance halls were already here in the Basin?

Tex: Well, they had the Oasis. It was one of the main ones and that's where we done most of our playin' before. That was in Myton. And Victory Park, just this side of the Barn, that sets up in that little draw. That was Victory Park Dance Hall. There was an open-air dance hall, Ravola. We played there in the summertime, of course, a few times. Then there was a place, I forget what they called it, it was a place up there just the other side of Altamont, as you go toward Mountain Home. It was a big dance hall in there. We played there. It burned down later.

KI: Did you ever play in the Imperial?

Tex: Oh, yeah. When we first came here we played Imperial every Saturday night. Then we played wherever during the week, whatever we could get. Then we finally quit the Imperial because our crowds got so bad. It really slowed down. But the out-countries, we did ones for them.

KI: When you opened your Barn, it was called the Red Barn, right?

Tex: Well, that's what everyone called it. Actually, it was RW Ranch, Rythm Wrangler Ranch. Did you look at the old picture in there, the old barn with the sign on the front? It says RW Ranch, Tex Ross and the Rythm Wranglers.

KI: I didn't focus on the RW part because I just knew it was called the Red Barn. Sorry.

Tex: Everybody called it the Red Barn, so we called it the Red Barn. But it's blue, or it was. But the great thing about it, the nephews just bought it. We sold it for \$2500. It set there, us payin' taxes on it for years, so we finally decided to let it go. My gosh! He's paid \$97,000 for it! And he

had to change everything: the floor joists, the roofing, the ceiling, everything. It was pretty well replaced.

KI: What year did you sell it?

Tex: Gee, you got me there, I don't know, but it's been a long time ago.

KI: Do you remember the decade?

Tex: It was probably in the '70s.

KI: Who did you sell it to at the time?

Tex: Slim. See, it was in his name. It was on his ground and in his name and he was responsible for the taxes on it. They just kept comin' and he was having a hard time gettin' the other guys, includin' me, to share up on the taxes, one thing and another. He got discouraged and he finally wanted to sell. I said, "You go ahead. My gosh, we aren't doin' nothin' with it."

Anyway, I moved to Albuquerque one year. Well, first there was a survey crew come in to Roosevelt. We was still playing the Barn at that time. A lot of those guys was comin' to the dances. I got talkin' with one guy and he said, "Why don't you go to work with us?" He said, "I'm the foreman of this survey crew." We got to be real good friends.

So, Slim and I both went to work for United Geo-Physical Company, surveying. They was in here for several years. Anyway, we worked for them until they moved out of here.

KI: That was your day job? You were still playing?

Tex: Yeah. Smitty, my boss, we called him Smitty, he moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, so he called me and asked me if I'd come down there and go to work for him. We was still playin' in the Barn, but I went down there anyway to go to work for him because I couldn't make enough in the Barn to do us all that much good. So, I got there when I could, but I moved to Albuquerque, moved my family down there, though I didn't move my family to Albuquerque. I worked at Albuquerque for Lastever Neon Company. Then I went to work up at Taos, New Mexico, for a guy up there. He'd advertised for somebody that knew how to do everything in the neon line, except make the glass, he was a glassblower. I went to work for him because I'd done a lot of metal work, making the cans and all electric work and so on. Anyway, I worked for him one summer.

What happened with Smitty and his survey crew: I guess things got going pretty slow for his business and he went and made application for a civil service survey job and, gosh, he got right on. I went with him and put in application, too, but I just never had enough experience. They required a lot of background experience that I didn't have, so they turned me down. So, I came home. On the way home from down there, I went in to Western Neon in Grand Junction, and they gave me a job right quick. So, I came home and moved my family to Grand Junction.

KI: How many children did you and Louise have?

Tex: We had seven.

KI: What are their names?

Tex: We had four boys and three girls. We had Gilbert, I was showing you, he was a guitar picker. Carolyn was my oldest, she lives in Ephraim now, and Gilbert lives here. Lucky; Lucky's back in Michigan, he just called, I talked to him last night. He said he's coming back, he'll be here in about a week. He was my number two boy. Then LuAnn. LuAnn, I've got a big picture of her in there, she was my red-haired daughter. She died with cancer about three years ago. Next to her was Randy and then Rhonda. Who have I missed? I think that's all. Anyway, four boys and three girls. Oh, Kent! Kent, he's the baby. He's a teacher down in Naples now. He teaches, I think, fourth grade, third or fourth grade, at Naples. He's my bass player now.

Gib's my take-off guitar player. We play with Marvin Bozarth. He's out of Roosevelt and he's a rhythm guitar player. We've got a jam session tomorrow at Colleen's and them's the guys that will be there.

KI: Now we have to get back to where we were. You said you moved your family in to work for the neon company in Grand Junction.

Tex: Yeah. I worked for Western Neon.

KI: How long did you have the dances and were you working all the time at the Barn?

Tex: We played there eight years. Now, the last part of it we was working other jobs, but we still played there. Even after that, once in a while we'd have a dance, but we wouldn't have them regular. You know, a dance hall is only good for so long and the thing that keeps them going is having different music continually. But we was the same old story all the way through, but we was there eight years. We had wonderful crowds even when the snow was that deep.

I was out there one day and I said, "I don't know what to do about all this snow." And a guy said, "You just keep having them dances. The crowds will worry about the snow." Which they did. We pushed it off a time or two, but after that we just let it go. They'd just tromp it down. So, we got by.

KI: So, then you get over to Grand Junction.

Tex: Yeah. I worked there until they had a layoff. They had the first layoff they'd had in eleven years and I was one of the first to go because I was one of the last to be hired. But it was a good company and I enjoyed working with them. What I did then, they had one guy that did all the outside-of-town work, out of Grand Junction. He'd go around to all the towns, wherever they had a job and I was his helper. So, we went everywhere. My gosh, we went up to Eagle, Colorado, and all these little towns, Delta, and these little towns we'd played when we were playing with the show. Colberg and up to Monticello. My gosh, Montrose and all those little places, Delta and Fruita and all those places we'd played with that show. I'd been around there quite a lot, even up to Afton. So, I kind of knew my way around a little bit.

Anyway, I worked for them until they had the layoff. Then I went in to Salt Lake and

went to work for General Motors. I was working on train engines. They had big diesel engines. The engines was sixteen feet long.

KI: Locomotives?

Tex: Yeah. And that was my job, spray painting those motors. I worked there for a few years until we decided to come back to Vernal. We moved back here in 1958 and I rented a little house out in Ashley Ward. Then I bought three acres out in Ashley Ward and built me a house there. Actually, the first part of the house was a house that was up in where the dam is.

KI: Steinaker?

Tex: Yeah. They was building that dam and they wanted all them houses and stuff out of there. So, I bought one of them quite cheap and moved it down onto three acres. That's where I lived until my wife and I split up. We split up in, let's see, 1971, I think. We didn't get along. We hadn't gotten along for a lot of years. It wasn't her fault, it was my fault. I was a musician, you know, and kicking around with my music and I give her a hard time. But I still had three kids at home and going to school, so I just give her the house when we split up.

My gosh, I just did whatever I could. I was working signs. She didn't want me to work signs because it was a hardship. We had a hard time with money, trying to keep up, and that was our biggest problems. We couldn't get along. We couldn't see eye to eye. I wanted to keep working on the home.

KI: Did you mostly do neon signs?

Tex: Yes. I'd had a lot of experience. While I was in Roosevelt after the Barn got down where we needed to go to work, that's what I did. I went to work for Norton Sign Company. Almost all sign work was neon in them days. So, Joe was a glassblower and I was the installation man and I worked a lot of signs. From then on, that's about all I knew how to do. I did work here for six years for Ashtons, but I was doing a few little sign jobs, too. Then when Joe left, he quit his business in Roosevelt and moved down to Monticello and put in a sporting goods store. When I left, he give me three jobs that he'd taken money down on and he hadn't finished them. So, I did those three jobs. At that time I was out at Ashtons and they'd quit with their crews, so I just went on my own. I built up a little truck, put a boom up on it for installation work and went to work for them. Then I run into this gal [Mary]. Do you want to come tell them our story? Her and I was married in 1972, and, my gosh, we still fight! [Laughter to show he isn't serious.]

Mary Ross (Mary): Thirty years, the first of February.

Tex: I'm like the old guy, Sandy, said, "We've been married thirty years," and he says, "Me and my wife, we still hold hands." He says, "If I ever let loose, she'd kill me!" [Laughter] No, we've got along just beautiful good. You know, my first wife hated music. I couldn't practice at home. It was out of the question. And I couldn't practice out in the garage if she could hear it in the slightest. She had a mental block against it. She had reasons. I'd give her a hard life. So, we split up and we'd been together for thirty-six years and had seven children before Mary and I was



married.

KI: From what I hear, Mary, you sing sometimes, right?

Mary: Yes.

KI: Do you like that?

Mary: It's okay. I'm not as into the music as he is, but it's okay.

Tex: She's got a beautiful voice.

Mary: My sister's a singer.

Tex: Do you know her sister? The singer?

KI: Gardner? Is that Gidget? Yes, because I read about her as well.

Tex: Well, she used to play with me in the band. We played over at the old River Bottom. It burned down, too. We played in there and a lot of places and she was our girl singer.

KI: Tell me the names of the different bands you've been with.

Tex: I started with Park City Wranglers and then with the Rythm Wranglers. I played with several bands in Park City. There were other bands playing and I'd play with them periodically, just me. I don't even remember what the names of them was. It was usually the name of the leader. But after I came here, do you know Ned Miller? He was a recording artist. "From a Jack to a King," have you heard that tune? He wrote that and made it famous. He used to be a taxi driver here in Vernal and when we was playing in the Barn, he asked me if I would get on the GI Bill to teach guitar because he wanted to learn how to play guitar. I tried. I put an application in, but I didn't have the sheepskin, I didn't have the backing, or schooling, so I couldn't do it.

KI: Self-taught man.

Tex: Well, he finally left here and he went to California, and him and his wife wrote three hundred songs. A lot of them are good ones: "Dark Moon," and some of them. All the big artists, even Jim Reeves, made one his, "Snowflake." Jim Reeves made his "Snowflake." Anyway, he said he had a brother in the Navy and he said, "When he comes home, we're going to start a band." And we were still playing in the Barn at that time. Well, that's all I heard and Ned left here and went to California. I started hearing his recordings, they went world-wide. His brother moved here, the one he was telling me about, Max Miller. He was a wonderful musician, one of the best musicians I ever played with in my life. He just played rhythm guitar, but he had five hundred songs and he could play any kind of rhythm, any kind. We played a lot of Latin rhythms and different things that I could play on the steel and he did the singing. He had a wonderful voice. Him and I and Deloy Shiner was a band for years. Two guys built this little, what used to

be, the Westerner Club out here north of town. It's been The Office and a lot of different things since they quit, you know. But when they got that finished, Albert asked me, he was one of the brothers, he asked me if we would play their opening dance. I said, "Yeah, we sure will." We played there for two years. My gosh, they wouldn't let us go. Just Max and Deloy and I. Then they finally sold out.

KI: When you were together, what did you call yourselves?

Tex: We never had no name. They just went by my name if them two guys needed something.

KI: Just the Tex Ross band?

Tex: Yeah. I never really played with a band that had a name until I started playing with the Country Gentlemen.

KI: Who was in that one?

Tex: Well, they had a lot of different ones come and go. Jim Lube was one. He wasn't the original, though. Mark Hackford...

KI: Was Jim Amy's husband?

Tex: No, her son. Well, her husband's name was Jim, too, but he didn't play. He was her son and he still plays. But Gib and I played with the Country Gentlemen for fifteen years. We played together, but I was just a steel guitar man and he was a take-off guitar man. Whoever led the band was the bandleader, Jim Lube for years and Mark Hackford for years and whoever. We had a guy from California, lived over in Ballard, a drummer for quite a few years. And, oh my gosh, several different ones, all according to what time it was.

When we got playing, it was a pretty good organized band, we'd play Bud's down here for three years, then we'd get so old, we decided we'd better leave. It wasn't that they canned us or anything, but we'd go over to the Hilltop and spend three years and then we'd come back. We played there Saturday night, always doing other work, too. But we was always playing Saturday and sometimes Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and sometimes just Friday and Saturday, according to what they wanted. It just goes on and on and on. But I kept playing.

KI: How long were you organized as the Country Gentlemen?

Tex: Oh my gosh, I don't know. I tell you, my memory is getting a wee bit short. I guess we was together fifteen years or so.

KI: That was a good long time, though.

Tex: I can't break it down like it was. We played different places with different musicians. My gosh, they come and went. But Gib and I stayed pretty steady. And Jim. After Jim came in, he wasn't the boss to begin with. Mark Hackford was boss and Garn Dye, from Neola, he was our

singer and the boss for a while. When he left, why Jim Lube came in and he's still playing. The reason that we quit, we was playing out to Last Chance and they quit the dance, laid us off. Then when the guys got ready to go back to work, they would only pay four and I was the fifth. I was too old and senile anyway, so they just forgot about me!

I've done lots of music playing, but the first beer joint I ever played was out there to that old Westerner. I'd never played a beer joint. We played straight dances and we did wonderful with it. But dance work got to be like everything else; it went down the drain unless it was something really special. So, the only place you could make anything was a beer joint. While I was playing there at the last, we got \$50 a night.

But most of the fifteen years we played, we played three nights a week and that \$150 sure helped me along. But I didn't get rich, you know.

KI: No, you wouldn't get rich at that rate. I also read that you had a Tex Ross Old Time Band? Was that later?

Tex: The Old Time Band? I don't even know it. This name is strange to me. People might have called us that 'cause I've been playing all the time. I was playing with somebody, somewhere, different ones. My gosh, I played with my nephew, Jerry Ross, and he had one other guy from Ballard that he always played with, Earl Reary.

[Side two of tape 322]

KI: It's getting so you have "grands" all over the place, here, isn't it?

Tex: Gosh, yes. I have, I think, eleven great-great grandchildren.

KI: Tell me which instruments you play, which guitars, because the one I didn't understand, I don't remember the name of it. You play the steel guitar, the rhythm guitar, but there was another name for one that I don't remember.

Tex: The pedal guitar? The pedal guitar, you play the pedals plus the rest of it.

KI: The one you showed me the picture of, with the man holding the guitar, and it looks different, what was that?

Tex: A Dobro.

KI: And what is that?

Tex: It's a resonator guitar. They're mechanically amplified. It's not electric. It was designed and built and put out by the Dopler Brothers and they ended up with the name Dobro.

[Tex displays a number of his guitars.]

KI: Somebody made this one special for you?

Tex: I put that up on the top of it. It actually was built to go down here, but I wanted to experiment and see how it would be up here. So, I put another pick-up down here and this one here. So, it's an oddball. It's a good old guitar. Colleen's going to start playing this, she's just starting trying to learn it.

Anyway, I've got a whole museum of guitars. My gosh! I've got all the steel guitars. Well, not all. I've got a Martin and a Fender Spanish guitar, good guitars. I've got some antiques, steel guitars. I have five lap steels and three pedal steel guitars.

What I'm doing right now is building pick-ups, electric pick-ups. I was going to show you that. That's my machine right there under the window. I built that last winter and this winter I've been winding the coils. On that guitar I've got three pick-ups that are all Ross specials, because them type pick-ups are not made anymore, they was made back in the thirties and the early forties. They don't make that type. That's one reason I've tried to put this one up here to see if I could get the sound. The best pick-up I ever had was that type that I'm building right there now.

I had a model to go by. That old guitar that I had that pick-up on quit me when we were playing over in Colorado. I didn't even know you could have them rewound or anything. It just put me out of business entirely for a while. But I had the best sound that I ever had, so them's the type that I'm building now. I've got three on there, good sound pick-ups, good sound. I'm building a special. Do you want to see it?

KI: The special you're building, sure.

Tex: I'll go get it.

[A period of time elapses before Tex is again recorded.]

KI: Your early flying experiences would fill two or three books?

Tex: Like I told you, that one fly, that was just one of them. The first went bad, but I had several.

Lee Walker used to be the manager of the [radio] station over here, he started the first station that they set up here, and we got to be really good friends. At first, by gosh, he wouldn't let us in there. I wanted to establish a program there because we'd just been playing KFXJ, and they was having a hard struggle to get this station started. They didn't have the good equipment or nothing. It was Mickey Mouse. Old Lee was really getting popular, though. They were only going out seventy-five miles or so.

Lee didn't seem to want to talk to me and I thought, "Well, he just don't like western music." So, I went and sold a program if they would let us play it. I come back and, of course, that was what they were there for. They said, "No trouble." Well, we became really good friends and I find out, we're still good friends. He'd make me a tape and send it up instead of writing a letter from Scottsdale, where he lives. He's about three years younger than I. But anyway, we're good friends. We got to be really close friends when we were playing. Him and I, once a year we'd crawl in the old airplane and take a trip somewhere. Two days, three days, or so. He'd get off from the station and, my gosh! I don't know whether to tell you about it or not!

KI: Well, I'm willing to listen if you're willing to talk.

Tex: Well, they had a brand new station in Grand Junction they'd just come up with and Lee wanted to go meet those guys. So we decided we'd go down to Moab, in southern Utah, and they were making movies, so Lee wanted to go to Moab. We left here in the morning, actually. We left here and flew to Grand Junction and went in and met these guys that Lee wanted to meet and, of course, they rolled out the red carpet for Lee. He's the manager of this station. They took us to a beer joint, we had a few beers and showed him all over through the station and everything. Old Lee was interested, he didn't like to leave there and I kept telling him, "My gosh, it's six miles from town back to the field."

KI: Did you have to walk?

Tex: No, no. But I kept telling old Lee, "My gosh, if we're going to Moab, we'd better get on the ball. It's coming late." And he said, "Oh, heck, we'll make it all right." We messed around and I'd never flown at night, I never had in all my flying experiences. In fact, I never took any night flying lessons, you know. We never had instruments in the plane to fly at night anyway, no radio or nothing like that. So, finally, old Lee talked to them guys and they said, "We'll run you back to the airport." So, they run us back there.

We'd just got back there and a guy landed that had come from Moab. So, we asked him a question or two about the field at Moab and he says, "There's a little field right south of town at Moab. That's where we fly, just flying farmers, and private guys and so on, private pilots." And he says, "But you can't go around." He says, "When you come into that field, that's it, because you've got an 800-foot cliff right out there and you can't go around so you can get down." I said, "My gosh! What time does it get dark?" He said, "You've got to be down at 8 o'clock." So, I told Lee, I said, "My gosh, we can't fly to Moab and be there by 8 o'clock." And Lee said, "Well, let's give it a try."

So, we got in and we took off and flew off a ways and I said, "Well, we'll fly out a ways and we'll look it over." We flew out, I don't know, we was out about ten miles or so and I made a turn to look back and the lights were on the field at Grand Junction, where we'd just left, and we had fifty miles to fly. And I said, "Lee, we'd better go back." And he said, "Oh gosh, there's fifty percent one way and fifty percent the other way, we can go on as good as we can go back." Well, the moon had come up and the moon was shining nice on the Colorado River and I thought I could always follow the river back if I have to.

We flew down. It was the roughest country in the world. We kept flying. Lee didn't smoke, but I did at that time. He said, "Tex, you got any smokes?" And I said, "Yeah." "Give me a smoke." So, I gave him a smoke and he smoked it. Then I seen him, lighting another one off of that one. He was nervous. Finally, he took his watch out and hung it up on the instrument panel so we could watch the time. He had a pocket watch. It was coming up towards 8 o'clock, just a few minutes off, and I said, "My gosh, Lee, I guess we're going to have to go out and follow that river back." He said, "Awww, we'll make it all right."

Well, it was pitch dark by then. Not pitch dark, you could see a little bit because the moon was out good and there was still a little bit of light in the west. But I couldn't see a light nowhere. It come 8 o'clock: no lights, nothing. I was getting pretty desperate. I was just about getting ready to go back. We had to fly a little bit north to get onto the river. All of a sudden the town

popped out, just like that, right under us.

KI: Well, there's nothing else around there. It's just the town. It's not like you've got outlying places.

Tex: No, no. It was all just right there, down in a hole. You know how it is. I'd been through Moab before. We'd played Moab when I was with that show. We played there several times, but I couldn't remember a whole lot about it, and, my gosh, it showed up. So, I just made a round. I said, "We can't go around because the guy says when you're coming in to land, you land." So, it was getting quite dark, getting worse and worse by the second and so I went down in there and I come in a little bit high and built up quite a little bit of extra speed that I didn't want. Because I didn't want to run into a cliff circling around that town. I just made one little circle. We could see airplanes down there and could see where the field was. So, my gosh, we was coming up the runway, just a little short runway, and I told Lee, I said, "Boy, I hope that fence is gone at the end of that field 'cause we're going to go through it."

Sure enough, when we got to it, we was on the ground, though, we was still moving fast. They'd pulled the wires off and had 'em setting out. We went right out into the sagebrush. Oh my gosh! We was both shook up so bad, it was terrible. We set there for a few minutes and I said, "Lee, why don't you get out and give it a twist and we'll go down and tie the airplane down there where those other planes are down at the other end."

So, he got out there and he said, "Okay." I never thought about it, but he'd never cranked an airplane in his life. I set there with my feet into the heel brakes, you know, and everything on. And old Lee, he started cranking the prop backwards. It was still hot, see, and if you do that and it kicks back, it'll just take an arm off of you or something. It scared me. So, I said, "Hey, wait a minute." I said, "You get in and get on the brakes," and I said, "I'll start it." So, he got in. The throttle on that little airplane we had, full on, was right in. It was on a little, just a knob on the end of a rod. I said, "Just as soon as it starts, why push that in just a little ways and just as soon as it starts, then pull it clear off." So I cranked it and it started right off. And, boy, Lee pushed it right into the wall. And the airplane. I grabbed a strut and the airplane was jumping around in the sagebrush, going around and I was hanging on and trying to holler, "Get the throttle off!" Oh, boy!

KI: He just didn't know what he was doing, did he?

Tex: That wasn't our first trip, but it was our last.

KI: Was that the same plane that you and Slim owned?

Tex: Yeah, that was the one the band owned. The band actually owned that, Kurly and Slim and Cy and I.

KI: What kind of a plane was it?

Tex: A little Luscome. Just two place. Just a little light craft. It was a good one, a good little airplane. Then I went to work after that. Some guys come and asked us if we would fly a

scintillator down in the Hanksville country for uranium, prospecting for uranium. So Slim and I decided to give it a try. We went down. I had one bad trip with him on one trip down there, too. I won't tell you about it, but we was going to fly this scintillator. Well, we got in trouble the second day that we flew. We flew out over the Dirty Devil Canyon. Do you know that country down there?

KI: No, not too well.

Tex: Well, there's two rivers that comes together at Hanksville and from there on they call it Dirty Devil and it drops into a gorge, a real deep gorge.

KI: Where the Green and the Colorado come together?

Tex: No. Two little local rivers, the Muddy River and the Fremont River come together right there. Then they drop into that canyon and they call that the Dirty Devil Canyon from there down. It's just sheer walls and they're not too far apart. Well, we went over there and dropped down into that canyon looking around, Slim and I, he was doing the flying. My gosh, we got down there and the air was always going down into the canyon and we couldn't get back up over the rim. We had a hard time. So Slim, he finally fought it back over the rim, and he said, "I don't know about you, but I've had all this I want." So he quit, but I prospected there for two years.

They furnished me a jeep and I'd fly down to Hanksville, then take the jeep and go prospecting. I done that for two years. I finally ended up with four claims. I sold four claims for \$22,000. I actually got \$9000. The company bought the claims, but the money was coming from a lawyer from back in Chicago and they just quit payin'. I took them to court, by gosh, won the case. They give me a three-month note, see, to pay the rest of it, but they never did pay it no how. Still, they never did pay. I never did get anything more, so I quit uranium prospecting right there. That was quite the experience. I'd fly down there and work a week and then come home and play a dance and then stay a week, and then fly down there and work a week again.

KI: You were just all over the place, weren't you? Can you remember when you were a little boy, how old were you when you moved to American Fork?

Tex: I was eight.

KI: Do you remember what Vernal used to look like when you were here?

Tex: Oh, yes, very well.

KI: Tell me about it.

Tex: Well, you know, the Doughboy was in the middle of Main Street then, up on a big pylon. They had it up quite high. They had old hitchracks. In front of all the stores they had hitchracks. There was very few cars. There was cars, but not very many and people all came into town horseback or buggies. The old single horse and buggy was the main thing. If people had a little money, why, they always had a buggy.

Slim and I used to hunt rabbits and stuff on our own place up there. If a buggy come by, we'd slip out and stay hid and then we'd run out in back of them. There was a little box on the back they always had to put groceries and stuff in. But they couldn't see back there, you know. The buggy was kind of like the back of a car. There was a little window, about so big. We'd hop on the back of there and hitch a ride just for the fun of it. We'd go down and hop off where we wanted to. My gosh, we had a lot of experiences.

KI: Did you go to school in Glines?

Tex: Yes. The Glines Ward School that I went to was settin' right where the screen for the outdoor theater is [1620 West Highway 40], right there was the school. A little brick building, four rooms, heated with a wood-burning stove.

KI: Two grades per room?

Tex: Yes. They had first and second, third and fourth, fifth and sixth, seventh and eighth, upstairs. That's where we went. I went to the fourth grade there.

KI: Do you remember who your teachers were?

Tex: Yes. Miss McKee and Miss Pickup. Hmmm. The superintendent of school, the principal of the school... Johnny [McNaughton]. Anyway, he was the principal when I went. He was the guy that owned the ground there where they built the Safeway store, here in Vernal. They bought the ground from him. I know his name as well as my own.

KI: That's okay, it will come to you.

Tex: Just 'cause you ask me, I can't tell you. Anyway, he was the principal of the school. I had an experience there. I got burned pretty bad right at school. I had a pocket full of gunpowder in one pocket and pocket full of carbide. I had a pocket full of carbide and a pocket full of blasting powder, black powder.

KI: Why?

Tex: Well, Cy, my brother, the fiddle player, he was working in a mine and he had them things stored in his house and I filled my pockets full of that stuff. At noon I went out and built me a little fire in the coal shed. They had a coal shed 'cause they had wood stoves, them big, old pot-bellied ones. I got me a little bark and I'll show it on the kids. I'd take that black powder, some of them kernels was as big as your finger. I'd drop them in there and poof! they'd go. I got a droppin' them in there a little faster and all of a sudden it just went up and went off in my hand, burned my hand black.

What had happened, I guess I'd had it on my clothes, you know, that powder. I couldn't remember, but I probably jerked my hand in when it went off and just went off in my pocket and it set my clothes afire. I got down and rolled around on the ground. My dad always said that if you ever get in a fire, why just roll on the ground all around, so I had that in my mind somehow.



So I got down and was rolling around, but my shirt was all burning, burning under my arm and down my side.

Ray Richins, at that time, was the principal. That was after John McNaughton, something happened to him. He was keeping Slim in for some reason, he was in the fourth grade or fifth grade. And he was lookin' out the window up there, Slim said. And he said, "Your brother is out there burnin' up."

The kids got me and stripped my clothes off and my old skin, down my side here and on under my arm, was just kind of hanging like rags, you know. Oh, my. So Miss Pickup and Ella McKee, that used to live out here in Ashley Ward, took me down to Ella's place, I think. Well, I don't know for sure which one. They both lived close here to the school. They took me in there and doctored me. It took four hours to get a doctor to come up with a buggy. They got up there four hours later, but I'd been through a lot of misery by then. When we moved to American Fork, I had my arm in a sling. It never healed for 'most all the summer.

(Pause in taping.)

KI: You were telling me about the county building, the one that looked like the old castle.

Tex: The old courthouse. That was where 'most anything that had to do with this city or the county, or whatever, was in that building. I remember that very well. It set back in and all the front was lawn. The Chautauquas, as they called them, used to come in with their little shows and stuff and it was always set up there. The Indians would all come to see that. When anything was goin' on, the Indians'd start by our place up there and here would come the wagonloads of Indians, four or five days ahead of time. If it was the county fair or whatever, they were great for that. Always right there, Johnny-on-the-ball.

KI: Did they camp on the courthouse lawn or were they over on the fairgrounds?

Tex: Well, I don't remember them so much here in Vernal. What they would do is go out on Ashley Creek or somewhere, you know, and camp along. At UBIC, at Fort Duchesne, the Indians would all camp outside the grounds and the whites would all camp inside the grounds. Every year we went. That's something everybody went to was UBIC. There'd be people that had lived in Vernal for years before would all come back here for that every year. That was the biggest thing that happened in this country. Us kids would go over there. We'd gather soda pop bottles and get a drink of soda pop for two bottles. That was our big deal!

Anyway, the latter years that they had it, they hired a sound truck that come out of Salt Lake, Paul Sound, I can remember that, Paul Sound. And they'd have their speakers set up all over in the trees and cover the whole grounds. It was good. I even got up there and sang in the early morning, you know, before anything was going on. They said, "If you'll come over here in the morning early, why we'll have you sing."

KI: You were just hooked after that, weren't you? Do you remember what other businesses there were right downtown? Do you remember the Co-op?

Tex: Oh, yes. Very well.

KI: What else was down there?

Tex: Well, the bank was on the corner, right where it is. N.J. Meagher run the bank, owned the bank, the Bank of Vernal. The way I remember it, next to them, west, was a drugstore. Can't remember the name of it. And I think Ashtons. I can't remember whether Ashtons was in there yet or not. Seems like they was on the other side, west of the drugstore.

KI: Yeah, they were for a while.

Tex: Yeah, yeah. Then when we came back here, they was set up right there. Well, you know, I guess, right where they were. [Main Street between Vernal Avenue and 100 West, south side of street.]

KI: Yes.

Tex: But I believe they was on the north side. I don't remember for sure, and I don't remember too much.

KI: Yes, they were. They were on the north side to begin with. Do you remember the Confectionery?

Tex: Yes. Vernal Confectionery. You bet. In back of where Ashtons was at the last, that ground in there, they had the hitchracks and places to tie up horses and so on. We was always horseback because my folks never did have a buggy. In fact, my dad had a Model T Ford. I just remember one thing about that and I don't know how old I was. I remember my mom. He wanted her to learn to drive and they were comin' home from town and she hit the gatepost on the side.

End of tape